

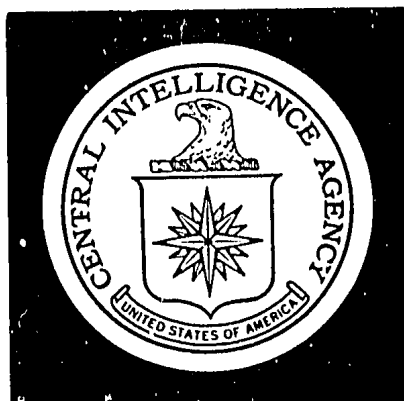
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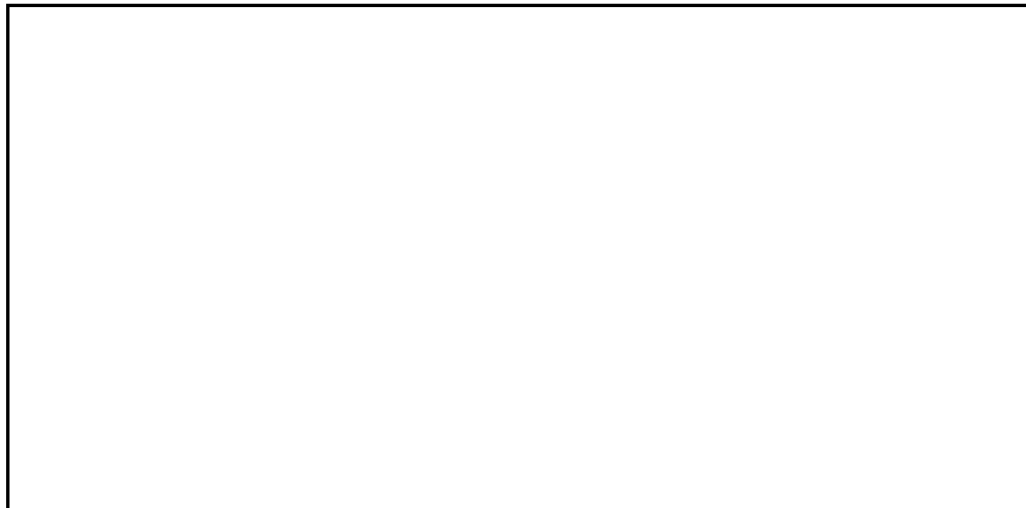
# Intelligence Memorandum

*General Giap and Hanoi's Intentions*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

General Giap and Hanoi's Intentions

Introduction

A recent article by North Vietnam's Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap provides some of the best clues to Hanoi's view of the war in some time. It acknowledges that the Communists have been forced to take several steps backward in South Vietnam, and it suggests that they are now buckling down for further protracted warfare.

The article, discussing the "military line" of the Vietnam Workers Party (VWP), is Giap's first major published treatise on the war in more than two years. It ran in seven installments in North Vietnam's party and army newspapers between 14 and 20 December 1969, and was broadcast to domestic audiences with considerable fanfare.

This treatment does not necessarily mean that what Giap says reflects the prevailing military view in Hanoi, or that the regime will proceed along the path he sets out. Giap was one of the protagonists during the debates over proper Communist tactics during the mid-1960s, and it often appeared that his views failed to carry the day. His last major work published several months before the 1968 Tet offensive did not point clearly to that coming onslaught. Even in retrospect, analysts disagree

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about what Giap was saying on that occasion; some believe that he was not in favor of such an all-out military effort, and others think he was its principal architect.

In the light of other statements from Hanoi, however, and of what the Communists have been doing for nearly a year, it seems likely that Giap's views on the war are closely in tune with a dominant opinion of the VWP leadership today. Therefore what Giap says in this article probably carries great weight, even though it cannot be regarded as a blueprint of Communist intentions.

It should be borne in mind also that the new Giap article covers so much ground in so many ways that it probably could be twisted and made applicable to almost any contingency. Moreover, most of it is quite consistent with what Giap has been saying for years. This makes interpretation especially hazardous, and this is why relating it to Communist intentions over the next few months must be done with caution.

This memorandum is an attempt to sort out some of the principal themes in the new Giap article. It is not a synopsis of Giap's work and does not cover all the ground he does. Instead, it tries to cut through some of the rhetorical smokescreen in order to extract Giap's message and relate it to what the Communists are now trying to do in Vietnam.

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The August Revolution as a Model

1. As Vietnamese Communists have done for years, Giap dwells on the so-called "August Revolution" of 1945 as a model for successful revolutionary action. The stress the regime has been putting on this theme recently suggests that the lessons of that first successful effort by the Vietnamese Communists to seize a share of power are being used widely to explain what must be done in South Vietnam today.

2. Giap reiterates that careful preparations enabled the Communists to seize a favorable moment--the impending collapse of Japan's war effort in August 1945--to make their move. He stresses that the party would have failed on that occasion if it had not previously built up adequate military and political forces, developed its grass roots organizations, and maintained solid base areas from which to operate. Giap seems to be saying that much more spadework needs to be done by the Communists in South Vietnam to put them in a position to exploit favorable openings in the future.

Key Words and Pregnant Passages

3. Some of the best clues to Giap's line of march are in passages that contain implied criticism of previous Communist tactics. For example, when Giap says repeatedly that Communist forces must be employed "economically" or "rationally," he leaves a distinct impression that he is chiding those responsible for not doing this in the past.

4. Similarly, when Giap says the party has always "creatively" applied Marxist-Leninist doctrine to the "concrete" or "practical" situation in Vietnam, he lets his readers know that tactics are undergoing change in order to cope with new problems. His awareness of the need for change is also evident in passages such as "we cannot copy foreign experiences nor be complacent with the experience we have acquired," and in Giap's injunction that when necessary the Communists should "change in time out-dated forms of warfare, taking up new ones which are more appropriate."

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5. Much of Giap's article strengthens the impression that the Communists have for some time been facing up to the fact that their fortunes have been declining in South Vietnam, and that new tactics and policies are necessary. He is most explicit on this point in repeated references to the "realities" of the war, and to how the party's policies have been "reshaped" and "gradually improved" to meet these realities. Such evidence is hazy at best, but read in the light of the basic issues Giap takes up elsewhere, as well as the situation in South Vietnam, it suggests that the bluster in other parts of the article conceals great concern about the course of the war.

6. Giap's prescription is essentially to prolong the war and to try to achieve a step-by-step come back. "Protracted warfare" is a rubric used by the Vietnamese Communists to describe their strategy at any time, and they have little difficulty in reconciling the concept with attempts to use shortcuts. Nonetheless, Hanoi's current emphasis on protracted war and Giap's stress on the need to "gain time" are persuasive indications that the Communists have no illusions about any early end to the fighting.

#### Building and Relying on North Vietnam

7. Giap insists that building up and consolidating the strength of the regime in North Vietnam is an essential part of supporting the war in the south. He and some of his politburo colleagues have argued this case for years, often under circumstances suggesting that they had reservations about the effects the war was having or could have on North Vietnam. The influence of such views probably is reflected in Hanoi's efforts during the past year and a half to restore a balance between the regime's dual objectives of "building socialism" in North Vietnam and fighting the war in the South.

8. Giap closely parallels the line taken by fellow politburo member Truong Chinh, who argues that North Vietnam must push ahead with socialist

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construction, strengthen party discipline, enforce collectivization, and better mobilize the population to defend the North and to carry on the war in the South. He draws the same distinction as Truong Chinh between the party's tasks in the North and those in the South. The main point of this argument is that the war must not undercut the building of an orthodox Marxist regime in North Vietnam.

#### Stress on Bases and on Rural Areas

9. One of Giap's most revealing themes concerns the importance of building reliable base areas to support Communist operations. His emphasis on a revolution moving from the organization of "political bases" to the development of physical base areas is a standard element of the concept of a "people's war." But by dwelling now on the need for building and defending bases in relatively remote parts of the country (the forests, mountains, and "sometimes in the swampy plains"), Giap seems to be acknowledging that the gradual erosion of the Communist position in South Vietnam requires remedial action if the struggle is to continue.

10. Giap nods to the development of Communist assets in both urban and rural areas, but his main emphasis is on the densely populated rural areas and on fringe regions giving access to such areas. He contrasts the need for rural "strongholds" (where "the enemy reveals all his weaknesses") with the need for "revolutionary bases" or a "struggle movement" in the cities (where "the enemy is strong"). Giap almost certainly means that the Communists should confine their efforts in urban areas largely to clandestine political organization, agitation, and terror, and concentrate on re-establishing and maintaining a firm position in the countryside. The rural areas, says Giap, constitute a "firm, long-term prop," and the Communists can protract the war "under the most difficult circumstances" if they are firmly anchored in them.

11. Giap calls remote jungle and mountain regions the "springboard" from which to expand the struggle into populated areas. In doing so, he points out the

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growing problems the Communists have had in places where allied programs have gradually separated them from many of the people and resources they could rely on in the past. Giap asserts that by "gaining mastership" over rural areas (i.e., rolling back allied pacification gains), the Communists "will acquire a firm basis for mobilizing human and material resources" to carry on the war.

12. In making these arguments about the importance of bases and rural areas, Giap echoes one of the main themes of Resolution 9 issued by the Communist command in South Vietnam last summer. Both Giap's article and Resolution 9 are noteworthy for the clarity with which they reflect basic Communist shortcomings and for the importance they attach to correcting these failings in the future.

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#### Organization and Size of Communist Forces

13. Nothing Giap recommends about the size and organization of Communist forces is new. Hanoi has long made a fetish of having "three kinds of troops": main force, regional force, and militia. Giap repeats this formula time after time, and in doing so implies that the Communists have devoted too much attention to the main forces or regular army units, including those sent from North Vietnam, and neglected the task of maintaining the size and effectiveness of regional forces and militia.

14. Giap may be criticizing the practice of "upgrading" militia and regional troops into main force units, both in North and South Vietnam, without adequate steps to keep local forces strong. With the emphasis the Communists put on the main force war through mid-1968, it obviously became more and more difficult to scrape up manpower for the main forces without decimating the local force establishment. If the Communists follow Giap's line, they are unlikely to do this again soon. Giap probably is prescribing tactics to cope with Vietnamization when he says that "especially when the enemy has implemented a neocolonialist aggressive policy along with building main force units of increasingly high combat quality, we must take interest in activating really strong regional armed forces."

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15. The concept of using a small force to fight a large one permeates all of Giap's writing, as does its corollary of using economy of force tactics. Giap bows to superior allied strength, firepower, and mobility, but he insists that the Communists can overcome their handicaps by using proper tactics and by stressing quality over quantity. He asserts that this does not mean the Communists should only conduct small offensives or fight small battles. On the contrary, he says that large-scale action and "decisive battles" fought at any cost sometimes are necessary. But he tempers this by saying that the Communists must know how to use their forces in the "most rational way," and how to strive for success "while using as few of our forces as possible."

#### Sources of Military Manpower

16. In making his case for proper organization and use of forces, Giap leaves the impression that there should be limits on the number of North Vietnamese regulars sent to fight in South Vietnam, and that to the largest extent possible Communist manpower should be drawn from the local population. There is no direct evidence that Giap has opposed the trend of greater and greater reliance on North Vietnamese troops, but a good case can be made from Giap's writings that the extraordinary commitment of North Vietnamese manpower through early 1969 was not in keeping with his line of reasoning.

17. In any event, by emphasizing the need for a "correct line" on building forces, for "mobilizing the entire people," and for forging an effective political apparatus capable of providing local support, Giap seems to be saying that the war in South Vietnam must become more of a home-grown product than it has been in recent years. The armed forces, he says, "cannot exist nor grow strong without revolutionaries or the people's strong political force . . ." The same idea is present when he says that the building of main force units must be closely associated with the building of "on-the-spot forces," and that the Communists must fight in ways that will make their forces grow over time.

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Party Leadership

18. Many points made by Giap are not entirely clear, but there are no ambiguities in his call for strict party control of the military establishment. As the regime's foremost military figure and as a leading member of the party politburo, Giap embodies the idea of party leadership in the army.

19. The last installment of his new article describes party leadership as the "main factor" for Communist success in the war. It is most doubtful that anyone at a high level in North Vietnam questions this concept, even though some military professionals down the line may second guess party judgments from time to time.

20. Giap's call for strengthening party leadership, for building up the party, and for improving the training of cadres seems to be just one more element in his broader argument that the Communists need to concentrate on fundamentals in order to gird themselves for the long haul.

Precepts of a People's War

21. In the fifth installment of his article, Giap lays out some of the basic features of what he calls "our party's military art." They encompass some of the themes mentioned earlier, but several of them need to be singled out: Armed struggle and political struggle are two essential ingredients of successful revolution. Giap develops the usual thesis that revolutionary violence includes both armed and political struggle, and that one cannot proceed successfully without the other. He leaves no room for doubt that Communist political action and organization efforts in recent years have not kept pace with the requirements of the war, nor have they lived up to Hanoi's expectations. Giap insists that one of the main goals of political work is to mobilize the population to support the fighting. On the other side of the coin, he argues that in addition to "annihilating the enemy," military action must support the political struggle by protecting people and winning them over to the Communist side. The Communists have clearly failed to follow this advice

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on many occasions, especially during the offensives of the first half of 1968 when their military tactics frequently alienated potential grass-roots support. It can be argued that despite the temporary setbacks those actions caused the allies, the Communists have never been able to recover completely from the damage their tactics did to their larger cause.

22. Quarter in rural areas but attack everywhere is another of Giap's dialectical arguments in which a basic concept comes through despite all the rhetorical dust. Giap starts with the customary call for attacking in all "three strategic areas"--mountains, lowlands, and cities (i.e., everywhere). But he carefully qualifies this advice with the requirement that "adequate" tactics and "suitable forms of struggle" be adopted according to the "concrete conditions" of each area.

23. In this section Giap draws a distinction between tactics for urban and rural areas that contains a swipe at military action against South Vietnam's cities such as occurred in 1968. He recognizes the 1968 Tet offensive as a time of attacks and so-called "uprisings" in both rural and urban areas, but he does not belabor the point. Instead, he calls for "maintaining a firm foothold in the rural areas" and for "regarding the rural areas as firm battlegrounds," while "developing the urban revolutionary forces." Giap doubtless applauds harassing urban areas with shellings, terror, and sapper attacks, but he almost certainly is not suggesting ground assaults on cities by infantry units at this stage of the war..

24. The "strategic-offensive ideology" is a piece of Giapian doublethink used to rationalize periods in which the Communists must or should be on the defensive. Giap insists that the Communists are always on the offensive ("Revolution is an offensive."), and that a defensive position is adopted only partially and temporarily while conditions are created for resuming the offensive. But by citing historical examples in which "we aimed at preserving our main force by avoiding disadvantageous battles and retreating to a certain limit," Giap demolishes a

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widespread notion that the Vietnamese Communists are wedded to a doctrine of moving gradually to regular warfare, from which there is no point of return.

25. Giap brushes off any doctrinal problems by noting that "various necessary defensive phases and strategic withdrawals" occurred "at the outset" of earlier wars, but that these wars were still characterized by an "offensive ideology" and eventually culminated in "glorious counteroffensives." Giap does more than recall an historical situation when he asks, "How could our people resolutely and continuously counterattack an enemy possessing economic and military potentialities far greater than ours . . . ?" His readers can hardly escape the idea that his words are fully applicable to what the Communists face in Vietnam today.

26. Applying a "protracted war strategy while striving to create opportunities and gain time" is at the heart of Giap's message. He notes that some wars are concluded successfully in fairly short order, and some go on for years. The actual timing depends on "many concrete conditions," especially on changes in the balance of forces between the two sides. Giap goes on to say that because an imbalance now exists, at least in terms of numerical strength, population, and technical equipment, the Communists must have time to weaken the allies gradually, to develop their own forces, and to overcome their present shortcomings. The realities of the war, he says, have shown that this is a correct strategy.

27. In making such a case now, Giap must have in mind the Vietnamization program and the changes it will bring to the situation in South Vietnam in the coming months. His advice is to play for time, to look for and to strive to create opportunities, and to recognize that in the course of a long war the situation often changes because of "our efforts," an "enemy's mistakes," or "objective conditions." If the Communists play their cards right, he seems to say, they eventually will be able to move from "step-by-step" progress to progress by "leaps and bounds."

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How the Communists Should Fight

28. Giap offers more specific advice on tactics in his sixth installment. He calls for "creative tactics," meaning sapper attacks, shellings, and guerrilla operations designed to frustrate "enemies having large armies and economic and military potentialities many times greater than ours."

29. As in every Giap article, the need for guerrilla warfare is discussed at length and with strong implications that this part of the war has been short-changed. Giap argues that just as military and political action must be combined, so must guerrilla and regular warfare. He acknowledges that regular warfare is essential for eventual success, but he warns that guerrilla warfare "is the base of the regular war," and that the two must be developed together. "Only in a situation where the guerrilla war grows and thrives," says Giap, "does the regular war have favorable conditions for developing . . . and for advancing incessantly."

30. Giap says that the war must advance to the stage of regular war, but the big question is knowing how and when to make the transition so that both the guerrilla and regular war will "grow incessantly." This passage almost certainly contains a message for anyone in the Communist movement who might be tempted to try a shortcut or who believes that because Hanoi dubbed the 1968 Tet offensive "the general offensive and general uprising," the Communists must relentlessly pursue "regular warfare" regardless of its costs.

31. Giap calls for "rich and efficient" tactics "appropriate to the realities on the battlefield." When necessary, he argues, "outdated forms of warfare" must be replaced by new ones, and applying "old experiences mechanically" must be avoided.

32. In what can only be regarded as a pep talk for those who have taken a beating on the battlefield, Giap says that assessing "combat efficiency" (i.e., the effectiveness of tactics) does not

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"necessarily mean looking at the results of each engagement." "In general," he says, "we must use our forces rationally and have superior fighting methods so that we can destroy many enemy troops and suffer as little as possible." Giap covers all contingencies, however, by also saying that sometimes there are important battles that must be fought no matter what the costs or difficulties.

### Conclusions

33. Giap's article strongly suggests that in the next few months the Communists will concentrate on trying to maintain a credible military threat, while going all out to prepare their forces to exploit allied military and political vulnerabilities as they may appear in the course of further protracted warfare. His call for strong Communist military action seems to be outweighed by his emphasis on fundamentals and on the need to correct Communist shortcomings.

34. Such an article is not a sure guide to enemy intentions, but it fits neatly with other evidence that Hanoi does not believe the time is ripe for an across-the-board challenge to the allied position in South Vietnam. Giap keeps this option open for the time when a more suitable opportunity may appear, but he seems to see this as a contingency well down the road. The article implies that the proper response to present allied programs is essentially to play for time, to protect Communist assets, and to attempt to improve the Communist position for the longer term struggle. Giap's pronouncement reinforces the conclusion that after the costly offensives of 1968, the leadership in North Vietnam made some basic changes in its approach to the war that make the prospect for any resolution of the conflict seem further off than ever.